

UC-NRLF



⌘B 285 518

BJ

1581

W56

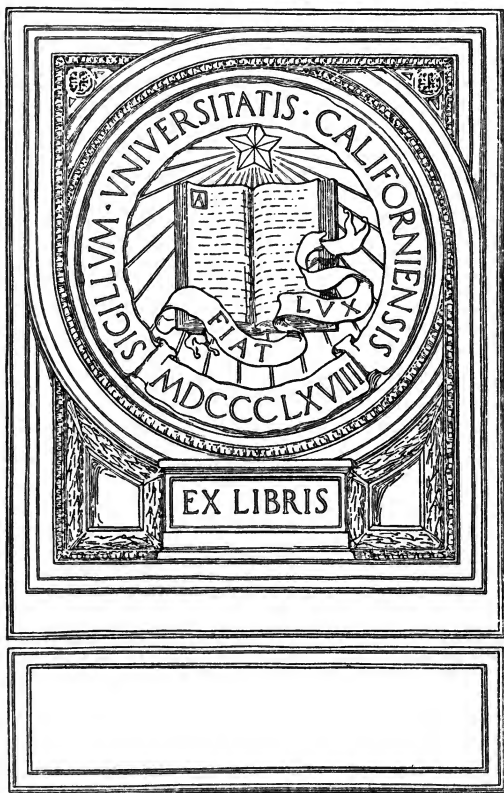
The Art of Life Series

How to Face Life

By Stephen S. Wise

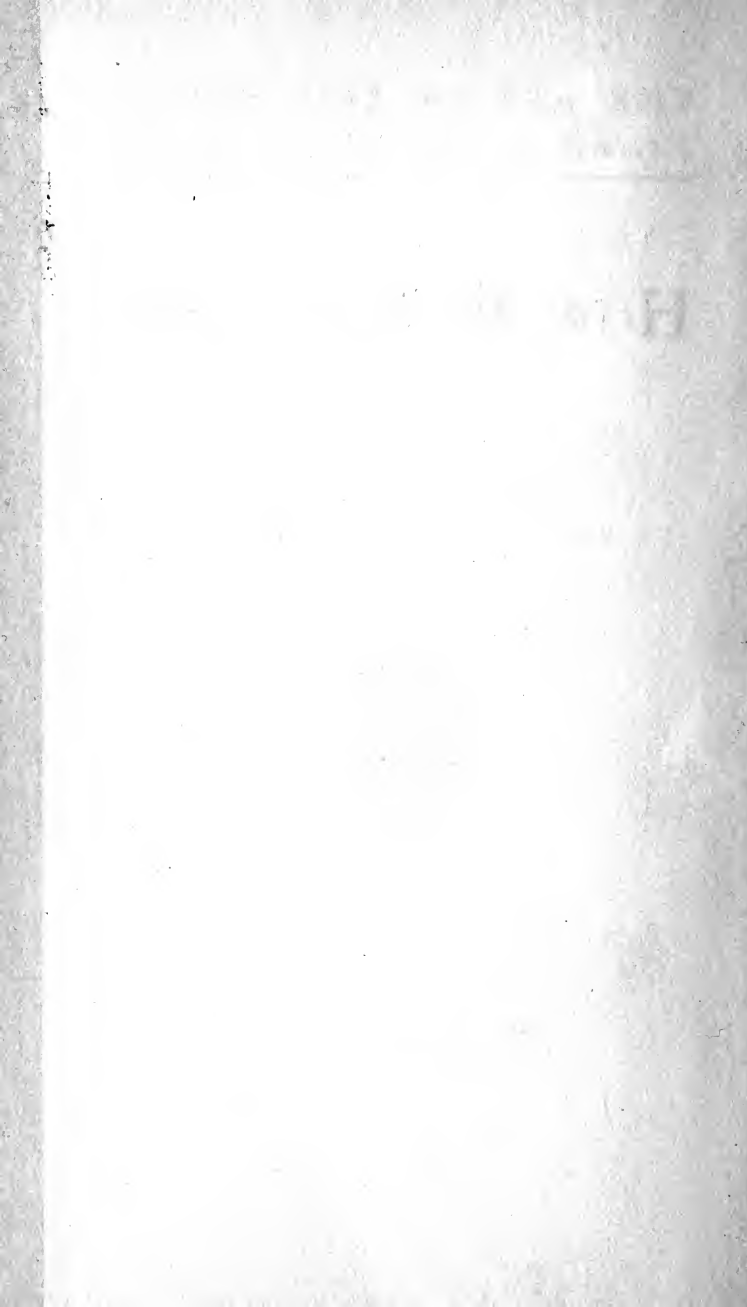
1B 22503

GIFT OF
Gladys Isaacson



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

How to Face Life



THE ART OF LIFE SERIES
Edward Howard Griggs, Editor

How to Face Life

BY

STEPHEN S. WISE

Rabbi of the Free Synagogue, New York



NEW YORK
B. W. HUEBSCH
PUBLISHERS

NEW YORK
B. W. HUEBSCH
MCMXVII

1351581
W56
COPYRIGHT, 1917, BY
B. W. HUEBSCH

GIFT OF
GLADYS ISAACSON

TO THE
LIBRARY OF THE
CONGRESS

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO
MY LOUTINJIM

M27840

CONTENTS

I YOUTH

PREPARING FOR LIFE

PAGE 9

II MATURITY

HOW TO SERVE AND ACHIEVE

PAGE 48

III AGE

HOW NOT TO GROW OLD

PAGE 62

3 stages of life

I

YOUTH: PREPARING FOR LIFE

"How beautiful is youth! How bright it gleams.

With its illusions, aspirations, dreams!
Book of Beginnings, Story without End,
Each maid a heroine, and each man a friend!
Aladdin's Lamp, and Fortunatus' Purse!
That holds the treasures of the universe!
All possibilities are in its hands,
No danger daunts it and no foe withstands;
In its sublime audacity of faith,
'Be thou removed,' it to the mountain saith,
And with ambitious feet, secure and proud,
Ascends the ladder leaning on the cloud."

—LONGFELLOW: *Morituri Salutamur*.

How to face life, how to prepare for life, are questions that must be answered by those who believe, as Lecky put it,

Youth - how youth must face life.

that the "map of life" must be marked out, that in the words of Emerson there is such a thing as the "conduct of life" which man is free to determine.

We are assured incessantly in these days that we must enter upon a great programme of preparedness for war,—back of which urging lies the assumption that a maximum of preparedness must be arranged in order to secure our land against the menace of aggression or invasion. If a programme of preparedness, which in the last analysis involves destruction and desolation, be impossible without the fullest planning, how much less possible is it to shape a constructive life-upbuilding programme without most careful and adequate preparedness.

Youth: Preparing for Life 11

Into the mind of youth must penetrate the ideal of self-preparedness,—not of external preparation for the outward life, but of inmost preparedness for the inner life. Whether or not the preparedness programme be, as some hold, more menacing to the soul of America than foreign foe can ever become because it marks an immediate invasion of the American soul rather than a possible aggression upon American soil, it is certain that life cannot worthily be lived save after preparedness in the fullest sense of the term.

It is, in truth, easy to stir up excitement and even deeper feeling over a purely external problem such as is that of war-preparedness, preparing to do something to another whether an in-

dividual or a nation or a continent. The easiest way is the way of external preparedness, the militaristic way, for it involves a minimum of reasoning. But preparation for life which I ask of youth involves the largest measure of reasoning and planning and purposing. It is the hardest way rather than the easiest way, though the pursuit thereof makes ultimately for the way that is inevitably rightful and unerring.

Is it needful to urge upon young people that they shall face life with the determination to sketch for themselves a map of life as they see it, as they purpose, if so be they purpose, to make it? What would be said of a military commander who entered upon a land to him unknown without securing in advance

Youth: Preparing for Life 13

the fullest possible data, without gaining, as far as it was possible so to do, an understanding of the outlines of the country he proposed to enter?

Curiously enough, it is often imagined that preparation for life is largely a matter of the higher education and exclusively associated with college and university life. This imagining may be due to the circumstance that men and women step out of so-called preparatory schools into higher institutions of learning. One sometimes wonders, in very truth, whether, instead of college preparing men for life, it were not more fitting to hold that after the college or university experience men need to be repaired if they are rightly to live and toil and serve.

My counsel is not for men alone but for men and women, for youth and maidens alike. Let no man venture to offer two kinds of counsel, one to men and yet another to women. There is only one manner of preparedness for life, for life is life and it is not one thing for a man and yet another for a woman.

Though I have used the term "map of life," map is hardly a happy analogy. For maps presuppose that a land is become known and familiar. And life cannot be foreknown and charted, if life it is to be, as every life ought to be, a great adventure into the unknown rather than the acceptance of a programme, a hazard of the spirit rather than a body of prescriptions and ordi-

nances. We are to fare forth upon the seas of life,—without chart. But some of us attempt to sail the sea rudderless, helmless, starless. Men and women embark upon life without ever having given thought to the storms that beset, to the rocks that threaten, to the unknown perils that may lie before. And then it is wondered why many fail to make port, why the ships of life frequently founder upon the high seas. The wonder ought rather to be that so many enter triumphantly into the harbors of eternity, seeing how rarely men map out life in advance, seeing how grudging is the time spent upon preparation, seeing how seldom men diligently and consciously prepare to meet those difficulties and burdens and problems which

adequate preparedness for life alone can fit the soul to face.

Let not life be mapped out so definitely for you, so accurately and systematically that no room will be left for the play of your own will and the determinations of your own spirit. I would almost rather have every map of life flung away than have life so mapped out as to leave youth no freedom of choice, as to fail to spur men on to face the great adventure, to be capable of daring to front whatsoever life may offer. Not very long ago, I inquired of friends, whose little lad is a pupil of one of the so-called best schools in the land, when they had applied for his admittance, and they answered, "Before he was born." It occurred to me to inquire what dire thing

would have happened in the event of the lad having proved upon birth to be a little lass, but the comforting assurance was at once given me that such contingency, not to say calamity, had been guarded against, in a sense, through applying for admittance to a girls' school in the event of the lad being born a lass. It seemed to me then as it does now an admirable thing to make such comprehensive provision for a child's education as to gain for it in advance of birth admittance into two schools, irrespective of sex.

But, without resting too heavily upon this illustration, is it not possible to prepare another for life so definitely as to deny to youth the privilege of willing, choosing, venturing, daring—even los-

ing? It were almost better that a youth go without the problematic advantages of school discipline than have his school and college and university career chosen and marked out for him rigidly and inflexibly. What greater wrong can I do my child than to withhold from him the freedom of choice, than so to cabin and confine his spirit that he must needs beat his wings in the intense inane without knowing the atmosphere that magnifies freedom and liberates the soul? Guide if you will the life of youth, but beware of the danger of maiming and crippling life through so definitely and completely mapping it out as to deny the soul of youth the peril of adventure, the joy of combat, the glory of hopeless daring.

Life must mean pioneering, not making one's way, but breaking a way, clearing a path of life for one's self. It is the glory of life,—and there is no glory like unto it,—to face the task of moral and intellectual pioneering. There is danger lest in our time there pass out of the life of men one of the most precious of things, that pioneering spirit that comes to the man who after he has fared forth, braved every danger, stood every peril at bay, declares in the word of the poet:

“Anybody might have heard it
But God's whisper came to me.”

The whisper of God comes to every man or to every man it may come. The opportunity for the performance of the task of moral or spiritual pioneering is

denied to no man. Americas of the spirit remain to be discovered within the life of every one of us. What man or woman who may read this will affirm that there has never come into his life a revelation the gleam of which enables him to see that he is free to reach a great decision, that his spirit may dare a great refusal, that his soul may utter a great affirmation? [The great moment of life is that in which a man is revealed unto himself, in which his soul is laid bare, in which it comes to him with the force of a revelation,—mine is the power to will and to determine the content of my life, though if I am to will I must dare to be myself, I must reach the decision, I must will, I must be free.]

Self-reliance

Youth: Preparing for Life 21

And the freedom of youth means freedom to be one's self, to be a law unto one's self, not to be one's self in lawlessness. Choose ye this day whom ye will serve,—remembering that the responsibility of decision rests with you and that, in the despite of all the lives that have been lived and all the maps that have been drawn and all the plans that have been sketched and all the precedents that have been set, you must live your own life, and, if it be not your own life, it is not life at all. Cherish the counsels of loved ones but remember that neither mother nor father, uncle nor cousin nor any kinsman or kinswoman whosoever can choose whom you are to serve. You cannot serve God unless yours be the choice.

Young men and women require to be warned against a thousand and one influences ever lurking near at hand to deter youth from the hazard of the spirit's pioneering. Despise the counsels of the over-wise and over-mature, the sum of whose low wisdom is that a man can make no graver mistake in life than to wander from the paths which all men else have pursued. The fear of seeming unusual obsesses the soul of too many of us. Not a few men and women would rather be wrong than seem different. Difference, variance, distinctiveness are not ends in themselves, but may become and oftentimes are the means that must be used by him who is not fearful of moral distinction.

Being Different.

Outward differentiation is nothing,

but inward distinction is everything,—is the counsel I ever urge upon my fellow-Jews. We are not to seem different for the sake of seeming, but we are to dare to seem to be different in order to be distinguished, in order to achieve spiritual outstandingness. When nice and refined and timid people say to you, “Remember to be like everybody else, don’t attempt anything new, don’t run the risk of seeming peculiar, don’t dream of venturing upon novel courses whether in things great or small,” remember that there is a possible invasion of the soul’s integrity that no man need endure. To the counsels of the timorous fling back the command to the brave: “Always do what you are afraid to do.”

When men seek to affright you by their counsels of prudence, remind them of the rule of one of the knightliest of Americans, the founder of Hampton Institute, who laid upon one youth's soul the burden: "doing what can't be done is the glory of living." And when men seek to degrade you to the level of their own base timidity, bid them to remember the courage and nobleness that were in the act of Higginson in leading a negro regiment touching which he said: "We all fought, for instance, with ropes around our necks, the Confederate authorities having denied to officers of colored regiments the usual privileges if taken prisoners and having required them to be treated as felons."

Pioneering, moreover, presupposes

Youth: Preparing for Life 25

unrest, discontent, just as it should. I am not fearful for the youth whose soul is in a state of unrest, the youth who has soaring ideals and knows not whether life is even worth living. If that be his problem it is enough for him to know, paraphrasing the word of the Jewish fathers, that whether or not life is worth living we must live as if it were and we must make life fuller of worth. Are you dissatisfied, are you discontented, so much the better for you. Hearing from the mother of James Russell Lowell of his general discontent with the conditions of society, Emerson wrote to her, "I hope he will never get over it." Better the nobly discontented than the ignobly content. Did not John Stuart Mill say that pigs

Unrest, Discontent, Blessed &

are always satisfied and men are always dissatisfied. But let your discontent and dissatisfaction be not with the world but with yourself, knowing that if it be noble it shall lift you up.

Grave consequences attend the too definite mapping out of life's programme. Men's passion for and faith in the profession of soldiering rest upon youth's yearning for adventure. And if, perchance, to-day great multitudes of men are yearning to take up arms, it is not because they would destroy an enemy, but because they would obliterate the emptiness of their own lives, because they are in revolt against the absence in normal life to-day of the pioneering opportunity. It is this lack of stimulus or impulse in the direction of pioneer-

ing which makes for poor, mean, low substitutes in the realm of adventure. The low gang takes the place of high comradeship, the debasing fling becomes a substitute for ennobling adventure. The passion for glamour and glare, as disclosed in the craze for the motion picture, is only another expression of the thwarted sense of adventure which the soul of youth dare not be denied.

Seeing that the gang spirit is nothing more than a crude, imperfect, at worst sinful, expression of youth's passion for togetherness, what needs to be done is to offer youth an opportunity for the expression of the deep yearning for fraternalism. Do young men imagine that they must have their fling? Is it not because life as lived is often so flat

and stale and unprofitable that the fling of the body is substituted for the adventure of the spirit, that, failing to grasp hold of the eternal realities and verities, men set out to magnify the passing and perishable? When everything big is shut out of life it is not to be wondered at that life becomes full of meanness and littleness and unworthiness.

- 1 Give yourself to something great, enroll under the banner of a high cause, choose as your own some standard of self-sacrifice, attach yourself to a movement that makes not for your own gain but for the welfare of men, and you will have come upon a richly satisfying as well as engrossing adventure. Either your spirit will greatly and bravely, nobly and self-forgettingly adventure,

or you will be in danger of yielding to the dominance of your appetites, you will be in peril of being overcome by your masterful passions. Dare to give every power of your life to the furtherance of a mighty cause. Let your spirit come under the dominance of a high and exalting enthusiasm. So will you gain the mastery over yourself, not as a matter of prudence, not as a matter of caution, not as a matter of timidity, not as a matter of duty.

Let something so high and noble come into your life that it shall be expulsive of everything low and mean. The men one honors most, the men one has reason to cherish most highly, are those into whose lives something so lofty and commanding has come as to

have left no room for the mean and petty. Having given themselves to the furtherance of a high and exalted ideal, life leaves no place for the mean. The selfish and the unworthy retreats with the precipitancy of the coward before the imperiousness of the noble impulse, the divine aim. And to their honor be it said, young men and women will rise to the highest level when it invites or challenges. There is in the heart of youth a limitless capacity for ardent devotion to causes of nobleness if but it be evoked and guided. And youth, too, understands how noble the venturesome deed may be even when utterly futile, how sublime in essence even when broken and foredoomed.

But men cannot finely pioneer nor

Self-reliance essential to getting up

Need of solitude

Youth: Preparing for Life 31

nobly adventure until after they have learned certain lessons in life. Men must learn to be self-reveringly independent, which implies not the aloofness of solitude but the aloneness when necessary of moral and spiritual self-reliance. Man must learn to live his own life. There is no greater danger in our time than that a man shall submit to the tyranny of the crowd. A man need not be remote from nor yet alien to the world and yet he may live his own life and live within himself. We suffer ourselves to come under the domination of mob-feeling and mob-thinking, such as it is, because we have not learned the art of shutting ourselves away at times from the world. We seem never to dare to be alone because, though we

know it not, we would fain avoid facing life's problems. We must understand, too, that, if the problems of our own life are to be met and solved, these things cannot be done vicariously. Not parents nor teachers nor ministers can solve those pressing problems of our inner life with which a man can cope effectively only amid the solitude of his inmost life. Until you have learned the art of separating yourself for some time in every day from the multitude, you will not learn how to think out and think through life's problems. You will not even know that there are problems to be resolved.

But while life is to be lived in the spirit of self-reverence and self-reliance, life's great questions cannot be faced

aright unless they be faced selflessly. Life is not to be egocentric but heterocentric. The question that a man must put is not what is he going to get out of life, how can he get the most out of life, but how can he put the most and the best into life. Life is not to be interpreted in terms of self, of individual gain, of personal advantage. If it be possible to differentiate between two classes in the world, these classes are respectively made up of the men who read life in the language of privilege and advantage and the men who interpret life in the terms of duty and obligation and responsibility. The selfless are the only beings who know how to live, who have learned and mastered the art of life. It is always pos-

sible to draw the distinction between the man who lives for himself, for what he can get out of life, for the enhancement of his own fame, for the enlargement of his own power, and the man who puts himself second, who lives for the good of others, who lives for the good, who is capable of denying self. The noblest of men and women are they who prescribe life to self in terms of duty to the world.

I venture to say to youth this day that there are two great needs in the life of youth, if life is to be truly and finely faced. Have an ideal, something to live by, and live for that ideal, wholly, steadfastly, unwaveringly. Many men are willing to cherish an ideal, to behold a vision, to catch a

every
ideal

gleam, but they do not seem to understand that ideals are not to be had cheaply, that a vision is not to be gained for the asking. One comes upon men and women in every walk of life entirely ready to pursue an ideal, but the pursuit must impose no difficulty, must involve no sacrifice. These are the idealists who falter not until sacrifice be demanded of them, and then their ideal is suffered to pass as if the ideal were nothing more than a fair-weather friend rather than a refuge in time of trouble, a bulwark during hours of trial and amid the storms of temptation.

Nor are ideals reserved for the great and outstanding in life. Every one of us has a goal, and you are what your goal is. Your life will ultimately de-

Self-sacrifice for ideal

fine itself in the terms of your ideal. Let your ideal be high and it will exalt you. Suffer your ideal to be low and it will be sure to debase you. You are your goal: your ideal is you. Life often breaks down here, in one of these two critical places, in the matter of willing highly and of having holily. Some men have neither vision of goal nor choice of way. Some men have the vision but stumble on the way,—the men who think the goal more important than the way, forgetting that the way is the goal. And so many falter and fumble, forgetting that life's most important choice is as truly of a path as of the goal, that the way that leads thither is of the essence of the dream and the triumph. What thou wouldst have

Man is what he thinks

highly thou must have holily. We will to have high things, but we are not prepared to achieve them holily, as if the manner of the quest were less holy than the matter of the goal.

Who does not know of men in business who aim to secure a competence and are resolved to put by the ways that are sharp and mean, after a fortune has been secured? Men vainly imagine that after they have amassed much they will neutralize the evil they have done by doing much good, but in the meantime they have done evil to themselves and are no longer free to live by the ideal. Giving themselves unholily to the quest of the high, they have become transformed and debased into something mean and strange. One knows of men

in the ministry to whom is given the putatively wise counsel to be discreetly cautious and evasively silent until the time comes for the occupancy of a great pulpit, when, as it is basely said, a man can afford to speak out of his soul. But when the great pulpit prize is won, the gleam, alas, is gone, the vision lies shattered. The man has been corrupted and his soul corroded and he who was willing for a time to be silent in the hope that some day, through the methods of silence, he might achieve the right of speaking out more bravely, has in the meantime become a dumb dog who has lost the power as well as the will to utter himself in fashion brave and unafraid.

Seemingly good men, outwardly de-

cent men enter into political life and imagine that they must for a time strike hands with corruption until the hour will come when they shall be able to smite corruption with their own fists. They palter and they falter, whispering sorrowfully, "Truly it is regrettable, but one must do these things." One distinguished statesman in American life declared to a friend many years ago that there are times when a man must eat a peck of dirt in order to gain high office. He gained the office, he ate his peck, and the tragedy is that it is not only become the steady article of his diet, but he loves it and he would not live without it, that it is become of the very essence of his being.

In other words, a man cannot wallow

through the mire to the skies. No man can have two standards, one to be followed until he be forty or fifty, and then suddenly put away. No man can divest himself of the lower ideal which he has adopted as a temporary expedient, because in the meantime it has come to have the mastery over his soul. Putting aside the great choice, the hour comes when a man finds himself incapable of the great refusal and the standard to which he gave his temporary adherence, to be abandoned in the years of opulence and safety, becomes his despotic and inescapable master. It is no more possible to have two standards in the world of the spirit than it is possible to prescribe two different moral standards for men and women. Unity must

be sought and achieved at the outset, not a lowered standard in the beginning and a higher standard in the end. The habit of the soul cannot be altered at will. Once to every man and not a thousand times comes the moment to decide, and the earlier decision will in part, if not in whole, be determinative of every later choice.

And if, young men and women, there were nothing else for which to prepare, there is the future, there is the holy calling of parenthood to be pursued by most of you. Have I not the right to appeal to young men and women to-day to remember how much or how little they can make of their own lives, and may we not base such appeal upon the truth that they are to be the makers and the

molders of the morrow; that unless their lips and lives proclaim the voice of God in the soul of man, there will follow a little-souled and mean-hearted generation instead of a race of great-hearted and noble-souled men and women.

A beautiful passage in an allegory recently presented upon the stage tells of the song of unborn souls, which are dreaming of the parenthood to be their lot upon earth and looking forward with heavenly joy to the supreme felicity and benediction of parenthood. The most important duty of youth is to prepare with consciousness and consecration for life's highest duty,— the duty of parenthood. Shall that future be polluted, shall that heritage be befouled? In reminding young men and women as I do

that they are the trustees of the morrow, that they hold in their keeping the destiny of all the future, I am tempted to ask a question. What if I were to bring a little child before you, some beautiful child of a year or two, and what if some man sitting in this company were to come hither and for some unknown reason strike that child: would it not be with difficulty that we could restrain ourselves from doing violence to such a creature? What of the men and women committing a crime infinitely more hurtful, who would not strike a little child, but who, none the less, are ready to doom unborn generations to a heritage of evil, of hurt, of shame? What young man or woman will not think upon that?

A further word should be spoken to young women who in every generation are standard-bearers, and not only standard-bearers but standard-lifters. I know it to be true that oftentimes women conform to the lower standards which men impose upon them. Yet is it true that women may be the makers of standards if they will, and that, if they consent to the lowering of the standards, men will readily and, alas, eagerly lapse to the lower levels. Will not young women understand that, if they suffer standards to be lowered, if they for any reason yield to the temptation to be their poorer, unworthier selves in the sight of men, then will they corrupt men, then will they in very truth have broken

faith with the moral order which has vested womanhood with the supreme privilege of exalting standards and by the exalting of standards exalting men.

I have said nothing up to this time about the place of God in the life of youth. I never feel it my duty to urge you to believe in God as if faith in God, as if trust in God, as if the acceptance of God were a task to be superimposed rather than a privilege to be coveted. To young men and women I would say that the one thing in the world they may not omit to do is to leave room for God in their lives. But you cannot leave room for God if your life be choked and clogged with things, and things, and things. Leave a place in your life for

the spirit of God and God will find his way into your life and lead you to the making of a life divine.

Reviewing what has gone before, the great thing in life is to map it out in youth. Not that one is to refrain from venturing upon the uncharted sea but that, howsoever daringly one is ready to fare forth upon the seas, one may not forget the guidance of the stars. It is a great thing to venture upon the imperiling seas of life without the assurance of safety and reward for one's plans and toils. It is a greater thing so to fare forth as to come inevitably under the direction of the fixed stars in the heavens of the spirit divine.

Upon a stained window in the dwelling of a noble friend I came upon some

lines which I commend to the soul of
youth everywhere:

“Climb high
Climb far
Your goal the sky
Your aim the star.”

II

MATURITY: HOW TO SERVE AND ACHIEVE

MATURITY, or the middle period of life, is in a sense the largest part of life, and is not to be viewed merely as the period after youth and before old age. It is relative only as all time is relative, but it is absolute, too. In truth, it is the time of that self-dependence which comes with the consciousness of power in maturity. It is the very body and substance of life and least relative,—for youth is its foreshadowing and old age the shadow which it casts behind. Middle age is not a link be-

tween youth and old age, but that period of life to which youth is an approach,—from which old age is an exit. Comparing life to a bridge, youth and old age might be likened to the piers which must be builded, but the linking together of the piers, the stretching of the cables over which the larger part of life's pilgrimage must be made is the task of life's middle period.

Life is so constituted that it were almost within the limits of reasonableness to urge that life need not pass out of the middle stage into old age. Loath though one be to enter upon maturity, it need never be left behind in return for age if it be entered upon in the spirit of preparedness. Middle age is hard and bitter if youth have been misspent,

if youth have not been the stage of conscious preparation for life.

Certain rules have been laid down for the governance of youth and the question may be asked whether these are pertinent to the needs and tasks of middle age,—namely the law that one must have an ideal by which to live, and that one must not merely live by it but up to it. As for the rules which are to be binding upon the middle period of life, who shall venture to prescribe them, save that certain things are obviously true,—that middle age shall continue that which youth initiates, and that there shall be no sharp frontier dividing youth from that which comes after. For middle age is not so much a part of life as it is life, and life absolute.

Middle age is but a part of the same life-long journey which in its early stages is youth, which culminates in age. And yet in a sense a different type of rules and ordinances is applicable to every one of the three great periods of life. For life is not a journey, even and unvarying, over a wide plain. Life may best be likened to the ascent of a mountain and in turn the descent from its summit, and the laws that govern life must be variously modified in order to meet the needs of the different periods along the journey.

In the early stages, during the hours of the ascent, the imperative thing is that a man shall not over-tax his strength, that he shall not overstrain his powers in the initial stages of the

journey, that he shall not attempt too much, that he shall not travel at too wearying a pace. As man nears the summit of the mountain, it becomes needful for him to conform to other rules. He must not lose the stride, he must know how to go on, he must climb and climb without succumbing to the heat of the day. Once the descent is begun, yet other rules apply, if one is with safety to reach the end of the long journey. The glory of the morning no longer upbears him, the splendor of the noonday sun no longer maintains his strength. But as he leaves youth's vigor and the power of maturity behind him, the glow of the passing day may irradiate his vision and reveal to him the distant horizon.

Middle age seems too often a painful reluctance to leave youth behind and to be a more painful hesitancy in the matter of facing the oncoming of age. Unhappily for itself, middle age oft combines the childishness of immaturity with the senescence of post-maturity so that it lacks alike the charm of youth and the grace of age. Old age that is not worthy of reverence is contemptible. Not less worthy of contempt is middle age, if it have brought from youth nothing save youth's foibles and frailties. We not unseldom see — and it is always a pitiful spectacle, — men and women whose bark of life is unballasted by the poise that comes with strength and unsteadied by the serenity which ought to be the mark of the maturer

period. While men speak of the dignity of old age, it is in truth the middle age which is in need of dignity, which alas it too often lacks.

Men frequently refer to the emptiness and the barrenness of old age, when it is oftenest middle age that is empty and meaningless, for it is the time when life's emptiness is disclosed. It is in middle age that men are made to face the bitter truth that theirs is not to achieve and to serve because they have not set up any standards worthy of the name, because their goal, such as it is, is too immediately accessible, and they cannot serve because self, having been their very deity, has not suffered them to will to serve or to learn how to serve.

The temptation of middle age is to

yield to the spirit of disenchantment, though verily that is oft-times called disenchantment which means nothing more than the absence of enchantments. The temptation of middle age is not so much to give up ideals as to realize that one is without them. Then men mistake their poor plans and plottings, their puny purposes for ideals and wonder why they have lost that which in truth they never had. Men rarely lose ideals. Poor, imperfect substitutes for ideals are found out and find out their owners,—if so they may be named. Men are not to fear losing ideals in middle age. They are to fear not having them in youth so that they cannot hold them throughout life.

Middle age depends upon youth, and

its disillusionments are due chiefly to the absence of illusions in the time of youth. In middle and in old age men suddenly discover that they cannot reap what in youth they have failed to sow. That middle age finds the ideals of youth unsatisfying and even unengrossing, indicts only youth and not itself, shows that the map of life, if drawn at all and as drawn in youth, was not ample and generous enough to have proved sufficing for a lifetime.

Assuming that middle age is less joyous than youth, it enjoys one supreme satisfaction, or rather reaps one supreme compensation, that of the consciousness of two powers, two of life's sovereign powers, the power to achieve and the power to serve. If youth ini-

tiates, middle age most achieves and best serves,—most achieves because it is a time of fullness of intellectual strength and firmness of moral will; best serves because the stains of self have been or ought to have been burnt out and there is left the capacity of selfless enlistment under banners unrelated to personal gain or private advantage. The middle age that men find bare and unsatisfying is in truth that to them who have not mastered the two arts of life, achieving and serving.

Certain mistakes are not uncommon in respect of the interpretation of middle age, for example, that it is not the period of high initiative. Because things are not initiated with dash and flare, it is assumed that middle age un-

dertakes nothing. On the contrary, it is then and perhaps only then that things are begun and achieved for their own sake, that things are really undertaken in the consciousness of strength and with a capacity for achievement. Moreover, while little can be carried into and beyond middle age that is not initiated in youth, the soul of man has not in the middle period forfeited or abandoned the power of self-correction and self-redemption. It may not be easy, neither is it impossible.

Perhaps the supreme rule for middle age may be phrased in the fewest of words,—*don't stop growing!* Physical and intellectual maturity are not interchangeable terms. The truth is that men almost consciously cease to grow,

and even will not to grow at thirty-five and forty and forty-five and then proceed to wonder why life is so unsatisfying. Let men but remember that there is no such thing as maturity in life,—if maturity mean the cessation of growth,—for maturity were followed by post-maturity, which is over-ripeness.

Men need never cease to grow and mature. Men will either grow up or go down. The great and satisfying lives are those of men and women who grow on and go on until they are cut down. When Freeman died, he asked that on his gravestone be carved the words, "He died learning." He who grows and learns dies not. Continue, as long as thou wouldst grow, to learn and reason and purpose, nor yet imagine

that life is done when youth is ended. Nor let the middle-aged forget that going on is not the only possibility. Even in middle age a man may reserve for himself freedom, freedom of choice, freedom to revise life's foundations, freedom to begin anew if so be error have been made.

Above all, middle age must not lose its admirations, its reverences, its enthusiasms. The edge of enthusiasm may be dulled with the passing of the years,—but the body and substance of one's admirations need not be diminished, and by our admirations we live. Anatole France, speaking of the old campaigners of the Reserve, uses this finely stimulating word with regard to them,—“they unite the elasticity of

youth with the staunchness of maturity.”

There is another and an older way of describing the characteristic quality of middle age, which must combine “the wisdom of age and the heart of youth.”

III

AGE: HOW NOT TO GROW OLD

“ But why, you ask me, should this tale be told
To men grown old, or who are growing old?
It is too late! Ah, nothing is too late
Till the tired heart shall cease to palpitate.

.

What, then? Shall we sit idly down and say
The night hath come; it is no longer day?
The night hath not yet come; we are not quite
Cut off from labor by the failing light;
Something remains for us to do or dare;
Even the oldest tree some fruit may bear.

.

For age is opportunity no less
Than youth itself, though in another dress,
And as the evening twilight fades away
The sky is filled with stars, invisible by day.”

— LONGFELLOW: *Morituri Salutamus*.

old age.

OLD age depends largely upon the attitude of men toward the whole of life. Old age is not a joke nor a bore nor a trial nor a calamity, though it may be any one of these as all of life may be. But what needs to be stressed is that old age has no content in itself apart from the whole of life. Old age may be as nothing else a foretaste of the kingdom of heaven where faith and hope may meet and love crown all. But little can come to old age that was not in and throughout life. Alas for the old age of the self-centered and self-serving! If life have built walls that shut out, these cannot be razed by age, which will forever have made itself captive.

The crown of old age is a term that trips lightly from our tongues. Are we

not in danger of forgetting that there must be something to crown? For in old age inheres no magic to redeem and transfigures all that has gone before. Old age purges the precious metal of life's substance of its debasing dross, but the precious substance must be there to be purged. Age, like happiness, is neither to be sought nor evaded. It is a by-product of life rather than life's end. Not the aim nor goal of life, but the way of life must it be.

In the matter of reverencing old age, we rest historically upon the firmest Jewish foundation. For the Jew as no other man before or after him taught the world how to magnify childhood and to glorify old age,—to rise up before the hoary head and honor the face

of the old man. And this revering solicitude for the aged is still one of the marks of Jewish life. Jewish teaching has urged and Jewish practice has confirmed the truth that blessing rests upon that home in which the aged have found shelter.

Indeed, one is almost disposed to hold that there is a possibility of overdoing reverence for old age as old age, of becoming indiscriminating in the honor which one metes out to the hoary head. If the people of Israel have erred in any part with respect to old age, they have revered the aged head too much irrespective of the head and the man. I would not if I could break with that fine tradition, but, sometimes, it were well to ask whether old age is to be re-

spected as a virtue in itself, whether length of days should be regarded as a merit apart from what has gone before. Old age is judged compassionately on the principle that nothing but the good should be spoken touching the dead or the nearly dead.

One is sometimes moved to believe that if the aged are unhappy it is because age brings with it not only opportunity for quiet meditation and serene retrospect, but the necessity of thinking about the great issues of life. And many of us have never learned how to think. We have put off the evil day of taking thought upon life so that, when it at last comes, its imminence appalls. Men and women put off their questions and their problems to the end of life

Age: How Not to Grow Old 67

and when the end is nearly come, they lack the strength and will to think them through. The need of solutions is then cruelly pressed upon unpracticed and undisciplined minds.

Though I ask the question, how to grow old and how not to grow old, are we not, if we will be frank, more interested in the question how not to grow old than how to grow old? In the question, pressing a little farther, how to seem not to grow old rather than how not grow old? Seeming not to grow old may be attained by artificial means. Not to grow old may be achieved by inward grace alone. Need it be said that no one is ever deceived by external methods of averting age, nor is any one profited or helped save perhaps the

chemist and the dye-maker, save the babblers and praters of new substitutes for old faiths? Whosoever thinks of old age aright, whosoever has fitted himself for the dignity of the burden of many days will resort neither to renewing cosmetics nor novel cults as a refuge from old age.

Men speak of the penalties of old age and penalties there are, but what of its rewards, rich and abundant and wondrous, richer indeed in most cases than its desert? The old, because they are old, are treated for the most part as if they were travelers returning richly laden with stores of varied treasures from a voyage over remotest seas to some strange and wondrous spot. Old age in itself is no more a reward

than a penalty. And yet what rewards, paraphrasing Shakespeare, accompany old age, and how fitting that these rewards, friendship-bearing, honor-bringing, should wait upon what might otherwise be life's melancholy end!

The truth is that old age is not a period of rewards nor penalties in themselves. It is a time of duties, as every period offers life's cup with duties brimming o'er. Duties there are,—but there are privileges beyond estimate. And the privilege of privileges is to offer an example to others in all ways and most of all in the way of facing life with serenity. Finer far for old age to claim its duties than to enjoy its privileges, for the old ought to shun being pitied as weak and seek rather to be ad-

But old men should live

mired as strong and honored as serene.

When old age has the grace of exalting duty and subordinating privilege, it ceases to be the period of mute resignation. From one point of view, it is the age of resignation, for one wittingly resigns in part what death is wholly to take away, but, be it made clear, resignation is not inaction, renunciation is not willlessly surrendering torpor. These things imply will, action, choice, not merely an awaiting of the end without murmur or complaint. For old age waits not but wills; old age surrenders not but whilst life is renders return for life.

While different types of laws seem to obtain for youth, maturity and old age,

these yet are one and one spirit seems to pervade and dominate all. Let youth hold high its aim and pursue high aims through holy means. Let maturity serve and achieve and above all achieve only that it may serve with unimpaired admiration and undimmed ideals. And let old age be nobly wise and unafraid and unselfish to the end!

Much, if not everything, of the content of old age depends on the things for which one cares. If one care for the things that cannot survive youth or middle age, whose value is inevitably lessened with the flight of years, then old age must become barren and empty. Whether your old age is to be void and meaningless depends almost wholly not upon what you have and care for at

seventy or eighty, but what it was you sought to have at twenty, what you cared for at thirty, what you cherished at forty. Certain things may be harmless, even admirable in themselves, and yet are destined to be woefully disappointing if they are suffered to become the pursuits of a lifetime and men give themselves to things for which they cannot care when the years have multiplied.

Myopia may interfere with one's zest for looking upon motion pictures, limbs may become too rheumatic for dancing, tragic though this may sound, the hazard of games of chance may lose its fascination, even money-making, the accumulation of things, may pall or become impossible. But certain things there are that can never grow stale nor

wearying nor seem unprofitable. Upon these let men fix their vision and their aim, the pleasures of the mind, the tasks of the spirit, the possibilities of serving. It is almost life's greatest danger that life will be lived with care for things interest in which cannot survive youth and middle age. What if a man were so to train himself physically that he could run and do nothing else, so that after the period of running had passed, he could not walk! Would not such *modus vivendi* seem unwise and sadly blundering?

Would you avoid growing old? Do you will even to seem not to grow old? Then have a vision of life and amid a multiplicity of things have and hold, cherish and pursue an ideal. To the

man of ideals, to the man who in other words lives, age comes not. Age cannot touch nor wither nor blast the life pervaded and smitten through by ideals. Would you grow old, or rather would you not grow old, then live, and live by the stars. Such are the lives of the unaging. In order not to grow old, I say again, grow on in faith and hopefulness, in vision and serviceableness. Being without these things, some men cannot grow old, they are old. Unhappily for them, they were born old, as other men, whatever be the number of their years, die young. Having these things, age cannot ravage the spirit.

Such men and women are age-proof, their heads may be silver white, their frames bowed, their limbs palsied, but

about not beyond age

age they know not,—the men I have in mind, such men as that great physician who, after sixty years and more of unwearied and unrivaled service, is still an impassioned pleader for the right of the child, of the merest, puniest babe. Who will dare say that he is aged, who at fourscore and more spends himself utterly in the service of the least of these? I am thinking of yet another friend of fourscore and more, whose life is nobly dedicated to the furtherance of amity between faith and faith, who serves all men as brothers, who proves that he is a Christian by the love he bears the Jew. And I am thinking of yet another man who likewise has lived for fourscore years, perhaps the foremost educator of our generation, a pub-

licist of matchless felicity in utterance and conduct alike, a man who at eighty and more steps into the arena with all the power and eagerness of youth in order to take up arms on behalf of another great though much wronged servant of the nation.

It was once said of Theodore Parker that he gave himself unreservedly and with abandon to whatever truth, duty, love, the three sublime voices of God,—the real trinity in our souls,—commanded. Truth, duty, love! Have you tried these things? Have you dared to live by them and for them, by and for any one of them? Does not this word bear out what was recently said by a great American physician about a noble social worker,—that in-

*Some rebels &
what they mean*

If life is without hope, make it
dividual, who has no object in life, who simply works day by day, with the idea that he is making a dollar and is going to use the dollar for his own comfort, cannot have a very peaceful mind. But if one has an object in life, to attain certain things which will be helpful to others, and whose day is filled with that sort of work, that individual deserves,—and other things being equal,—will have an old age.

Truth, duty, love,—obey their command and when you do you shall find age a fiction and life alone a reality. What if old age be without teeth and eyes if it be not without hope and faith and fadeless memories!

“To suffer and endure,
To keep the spirit pure—

How not to grow old —
The fortress and abode of holy Truth —
To serve eternal things
Whate'er the issue brings
This is not broken Age, but ageless Youth."

If then life be centered on self, old age may rest in the certitude of disappointment and disillusion. But if self be centered on life, then may come what Morley described, touching Edmund Burke, as "an unrebelling temper and hopes undimmed for mankind."

Twofold must be the hope of man, — for a future for self and for the future for all. And when the soul is so freighted with hopes, then shall it be said of a man as it was said of the great poet: "He was one of those on the lookout for every new idea and for every old idea with a new application,

Age: How Not to Grow Old 79

which may tend to meet the growing requirements of society; one of those who are like men standing on a watch-tower to whom others apply and say, not 'What of the night?' but 'What of the morning and of the coming day?'"

My one word of counsel is,—let life not be centered on self, for to live for self is to invite cruel disaster in old age.

The saddest, in truth the most tragic, lives I know are those of old men and women who have nothing to live for because they have lived for self and self alone,—and self is nothing. Their lives are piteously empty. For the restlessness and excitement of youth may hide this truth, but age, like death, is a revealer. And there are many types of selfishness. I speak of two

Selfishness & lack of foresight

which must suffice. There are those who live for self,— for selfissimus, giving not the utmost for the highest but all for the nighest,— self, self, self, self's pleasure and profit and power and vantage and fame. These are the most crude and obvious types of the selfful, who shall pay the penalty of their folly and their moral disease.

But, though it be said to your dismay, there are other types of selfishness, though less obvious,— the selfishness of those who project self into and magnify self in family relationship. For there are those who simply extend the horizon of self enough to include other forms of self, one's own, one's nearest, one's flesh and blood. And here, too, disillusion is bound to come and ought to come, for

one's own cannot and ought not to fill one's life forever. One might well excuse our mothers and fathers for giving their thought and attention to their own, for these were many and life was hard and life's struggle oftentimes bitter. But for the fewest is such excuse valid now, — if ever it was valid — especially seeing that we concentrate upon the giving to others of things rather than upon helping others to their highest and best. In truth, people concentrate upon self, upon their own interests and wishes, and these things pass and little or nothing is left in life save self. Live for yourself, and you live two years in one; live in the life of others, and you divide your years with another.

Is not all this a paraphrase of what

Altruism & selfishness

Emerson has said better than any other? He who loves is in no condition old. Not lives and lives for self, not loves self and self alone, but he who loves! Emerson, building better perhaps than he knew, has voiced the deepest truth of the soul. Love cannot die and love will not let die nor yet grow old. And yet as a final word, and more needed than all else, I would say that there is only one way to grow old, and that too is the only way not to grow old. That way is to know, to love, to serve.

“Grow old along with me!
The Best is yet to be,
The last of life for which the first was made;
Our times are in His hand
Who saith, ‘A whole I planned,’
Youth shows but half: Trust God: see all nor
be afraid.”

RETURN TO the circulation desk of any

University of California Library

or to the

NORTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY

Bldg. 400, Richmond Field Station

University of California

Richmond, CA 94804-4698

ALL BOOKS MAY BE RECALLED AFTER 7 DAYS

2-month loans may be renewed by calling

10 (415) 642-6753

1-year loans may be recharged by bringing books
to NRLF

Renewals and recharges may be made 4 days
prior to due date

DUE AS STAMPED BELOW

10 MAR 92

OCT 16 1999

U. C. BERKELEY LIBRARIES



C046127850

M27840

BJ 1581
W 56

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

